

ATEL Committee Meeting

Public Utilities Commission

June 9, 2011

9:00 AM

Attendees:

Roberta Greene Whittemore, Denise Corson, James Litvack, , Jim Lanni , Charles Brown, Pam Kling, Ellen Lenox Smith, Melissa and Damian Rosenberg, Courtenay Petracca, Steve Florio and Interpreter Jessica Morgan.

1. Introduction

2. Minutes reviewed and accepted.

3. New ATEL Demonstration Program – we have had 3 more demonstrations since the last ATEL Meeting. Our last demonstration on June 8th, and we had 3 repeat guests; however, we had a guest speaker this month Melissa Rosenberg from OSCIL. She demonstrated various low tech AT and discussed a few of OSCIL's many programs, such as: OSCIL's Home Accessibility & Adaptive Equipment Program, Nursing Transition Program, and Gift of Hearing Program. OSCIL included the information on the demonstration program, in their quarterly flyer.

4. ATEL now has a new satellite location at TechACCESS. When ATEL was at Goodwill, we had about 95% walk-ins and 5% home visits; however, once ATEL moved to 40 Fountain St., the numbers skewed the entire opposite direction. Therefore, we are hoping with a

more central location to have a better balance of walk-ins and home deliveries. Denise will be able to drop off equipment at this location, or on the 2nd Wednesday of the month, Pam will be available for scheduled demonstrations in the afternoon. Also, if clients need immediate assistance and we are not available, they can pick-up a short term loan at TechACCESS, until Denise or Pam are able to mail them a new security agreement. Then, ATEL will replace the loaned out TechACCESS equipment with replacement equipment

5. Cox Communication- Damian Rosenberg came in place of Joe Pereira at the meeting. He stated they are still working on the program for Captel.

6. Wireless Devices/Legislative changes regarding TITLE 39 Public Utilities and Carriers, CHAPTER 39-1 Public Utilities Commission, SECTION 39-1-42. The ATEL Committee discussed adding wireless technology about 2 years ago, and at that time only one state had a pilot program offering only one device, a sidekick. Denise did some research on whether any other state programs are offering wireless technology. Currently, there are 5 states and 10 states that are exploring adding wireless technology to their program. Denise spoke with Sprint relay to discuss what products and services they offer state programs. The Sprint representative stated that they are very flexible, and will work with the state program to come up with the best packages. Some states come up with a price per client that they will spend, and the client can pick how to apportion the designated amount. Instead of ATEL deciding what phone works best for each client, the customer can decide which phone, features, and monthly

plans are important to them and customize the package. Also, the Sprint Program would ship the phone directly to the client and the client could receive service from any Sprint store. In addition, there are 500,000 landline users in RI and 800,000 wireless users, and 91% of Americans use cell phones, and 25% of Americans use a cell phone only; therefore, we want to try to expand the ATEL program to include wireless technology. However, due to the wording of Title 39, the ATEL Program can not provide wireless technology because it states to qualify for the program you had to have a single party land-line. Denise did a little research on what exactly is a single party line. This term references twentieth century telephone systems in which a party line (also multiparty line or Shared Service Line) is an arrangement in which two or more customers are connected directly to the same local loop. Prior to World War II in the United States, party lines was the primary way residential subscribers acquired local phone service. Most people shared a line with two to ten to twenty people. You could talk only five minutes or so before someone else wanted to make a call. And anyone on the party line could pick up their receiver and listen in to your conversation. It took until the early 1970s for single party lines to become nearly universal. Therefore, we believe that the intent of the program was to remove barriers to phone communication, while making the program self sustaining through deposit of telephone surcharge funds into a restricted receipt account, overseen by the PUC. Since this program was developed over 25 years ago, we believe that the intent of the wording was to make sure the telephone line they were using was only accessed by

one phone , not that wireless technology be prohibited 25 years due to not being forecasted when creating Title 39. ATEL originally only provided telephone devices for the Deaf. Currently, ATEL provides telephone devices for 4 disability groups: Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Speech Disabled and Muscular disabled, although, but we assist very few Deaf individuals, since landline devices such as the TTY are rarely used by today's Deaf population, and the majority replaced by wireless communication devices that utilize texting or video phones. We would like to revisit the wording of this Title and allow it to continue to remove barriers to phone communication. Jim Lanni stated that this is a minor change that should not be a problem to get changed, since we are only trying to update the wording of the legislation, and not changing the intent. Denise is going to work on getting legislative support to change the wording, to allow wireless technology. Denise provided a copy of the Title, referenced below:

§ 39-1-42 Access to telephone information services for persons with disabilities. – (a) The public utilities commission shall establish, administer and promote an information accessibility service that includes:

(1) A statewide telephone relay service and, through the competitive bidding process, contract for the administration and operation of such a relay system for utilization of the telecommunications network by deaf, hard of hearing and speech impaired persons;

(2) The adaptive telephone equipment loan program capable of servicing the needs of persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, severely speech impaired, or those with neuromuscular impairments

for use with a single party telephone line, to any subscriber who is certified as deaf, hard of hearing, severely speech impaired, or with neuromuscular impairments by a licensed physician, audiologist, speech pathologist, or a qualified state agency, pursuant to chapter 23 of this title; and ...

7. Open Discussion- Denise asked Ellen to test out a new wireless headset. Ellen did have issue with the headset but turned out to be an issue with the telephone base. Also, Ellen phone service went down after Denise visited, but it was unrelated to the telephone and was an problem with the inside phone wiring. Ellen asked the Committee if you needed telephone service to fax, and the committee discussed various options such as: E-faxing, magic Jack and VOIP.

8. The time and date of this year's quarterly meetings were scheduled at 9AM- 11AM at the PUC: changed September 8, 2011 to September 15, 2011, and December 8, 2011.